

The Dessert

TO THE TRUE AMERICAN.

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VOL. I.

AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY.

THE LIFE OF

JOHN TRUMBULL,

THE CELEBRATED AUTHOR OF M'FINGAL,

AMONG those who have successively contributed to inspire the American people with the love of literature and liberty, who directed their minds to sound views of the nature of government, and refined their taste by the two-fold means of criticism and poetry, the author of "M'Fingal" deserves to be considered as one of the first. Indeed before his time, however they might have been cultivated in the middle and southern portions of North America, letters were in a very crude and debased condition in New-England. Efforts, it is true, had been made to lead the general mind towards their more assiduous culture; but the slightest comparison of the writings of Mr. TRUMBULL, with those of his immediate predecessors, will surprise the critic with a dissimilitude, which, in any European country, could scarcely have been expected to have happened in less than a century.

JOHN TRUMBULL, was born in the town of Waterbury, in Connecticut, in the year 1749, or 1750. His father, a weakly and respectable clergyman of the place, early instructed him in the usual elements of education; and, flattered by his docile and active genius, led him from English to Latin and Greek. Nor were his ears unrewarded; for such was the uncommon vigour of the intellect of his son, and so assiduously did he apply himself, that at the age of seven, after a full examination, he was declared sufficiently advanced in his academic studies to deserve admission into Yale college. His tender years disinclining his parents to place him there so young, he was withdrawn, and did not join that institution till he was thirteen, or had entered his thirteenth year. His collegiate life was one continued scene of success. The superiority of his genius, attainments, and industry, elevated him, on every trial, over all his competitors; and such of his collegiate exercises as have been made public, evidence a spirit and correctness of thought and expression rarely discernible in more advanced years, and after greater opportunities of instruction. Mr. TRUMBULL graduated in 1767. In what manner the interval between this period and 1771 was spent, the writer of this article is not particularly informed. He has an indistinct recollection, however, that Mr. TRUMBULL was engaged in the business of instruction, in some part of Connecticut. In 1771, he accepted a tutorship in Yale college; and, as has been before remarked in the account of Dr. DWIGHT,

was concerned in various periodical publications with that gentleman; all of which contributed to his reputation. Some of these performances were satirical; and their surprizing success induced the author to turn his attention more particularly to a species of writing for which, till then, he had himself modestly questioned his qualifications. But, whatever might have been his own conceptions, as to the peculiar bent of his talents, his companions were too often forced to smart under the lash of his satire to entertain any doubts of his success. Nor does he appear to have been long held in doubt himself; for in 1772, he published his poem entitled, "The Progress of Dullness," in three parts, separately printed. This poem had an amazing sale; and, notwithstanding several editions, and one as late as 1794, is now seldom to be met with, either in the shops or libraries. To judge properly of the merit of this performance, the reader should be accurately and even minutely acquainted with the peculiar manners of the New-England people, and particularly with their manners at that time—for twenty years have made many changes—and as few foreigners can acquire this knowledge, the perusal of the "Progress of Dullness" cannot be expected to interest the European reader in any remarkable degree.

Mr. TRUMBULL resigned his tutorship in 1773, and repaired to Boston. His original design was to devote himself to literature; but his father, judging, perhaps, more prudently for his son, obliged him to make choice of a profession; and Mr. TRUMBULL having determined in favour of the bar, he was placed under the direction of Mr. ADAMS, then a distinguished advocate and counsellor in Boston, now President of the United States. But though he was now condemned to a pursuit little congenial to one whose inclinations continually tempted his feet to stray into the pleasant paths of poetry, Mr. TRUMBULL did not forget the Muses; and an occasion soon presented itself worthy of his pen. How he acquitted himself may be seen in his "Elegy on the Times," first published in Boston, in 1774. On his admission to the bar, Mr. TRUMBULL returned to Connecticut; and after no long time settled at Hartford, where he has ever since continued. Here he soon became one of the ablest and most popular advocates; and till within a few years (when his health had been so much impaired as to oblige him to decline the exercise of his profession) he was considered as the ablest counsellor in the county, and among the ablest in the state. His domestic habits, which seldom permitted him to mingle much in society at large; and, perhaps, the fear of his satiric talents prevented that eager interest in his behalf, among a large body of men, which would have carried him forward

into public life; and it is owing perhaps to these sedentary habits, and to this seclusion, that he has become the victim of hypochondriac and nervous affections, which now impair his usefulness and poison his felicity.

Mr. TRUMBULL has been the sole or part author of numerous periodical publications, on literary, moral and political subjects, all of which have commanded great respect. Of those, in which he has been concerned with others, none has attracted more applause than a series of papers, somewhat on the plan of "The Kol-had," and executed with equal wit, entitled, "American Antiquities," and extracts from "The Anarchiad," originally published in the New Haven Gazette for 1786 and 1787. These papers have never been collected; but they were republished, from one end of the continent of America to the other, in the newspapers of the day. They were the joint work of Mr. TRUMBULL, Mr. BARLOW, Col. HUMPHREYS and Dr. HOPKINS.

But the work which has most contributed to establish the reputation of this poet, is the poem of "M'Fingal;" a poem which has been favourably received in Europe, and which was read with raptur in America.

Mr. TRUMBULL has published—

1. M'Fingal, a modern epic poem, in four cantos, printed in 1784—last American edition in 1796.

2. The Progress of Dullness, first printed in 1772—last edition in 1794.

3. Elegy on the Times, 1774—collected with his smaller serious poems, in American Poems, vol. I. published at Litchfield, Connecticut, 1793.

It is said that Mr. TRUMBULL, is preparing a complete edition of his works, illustrated with notes, and comprising many unpublished essays and poems.

A CHAPLAIN of a man of war lately took his text from the 107th psalm, verses 23, 24:—"They that go down into the sea in ships, that do business in the great water, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." In order to accommodate his discourse to his hearers, he discanted at large "on the power of God over the ocean, his bounty to those seamen who engage in his service, and his granting protection to all who address their petitions to him." After he had finished his harangue, he proceeded to catechise a boy, who had been brought up on board a ship in the profoundest ignorance of every thing, except what related to the nautical profession, and among other questions, asked him "What was God?" "Why Master?" replied the boy with the utmost simplicity, "I suppose as how he is the First Lord of the Admiralty."

ON LAUGHTER.

Notwithstanding risibility is a power, quality, or talent allotted only to man; nature not having endowed any other creature with the faculty of contracting or dilating the muscles of grimace; yet laughing is as often the trumpet of folly, as it is the ensign of joy; for, as the poet says,

Per risum multum poteris cognoscere stultum.

To laugh upon every occasion is a proof that every trifle that presents itself to us is capable of giving us pleasure; and we thereby demonstrate the want of a judicious taste, and a discerning genius. The man who often laughs becomes at length ridiculous, and the woman who is guilty of this error, is much to be pitied; for besides modesty, the most brilliant ornament of the sex, greatly suffering thereby, the physiognomy is much disfigured, as it widens the mouth, inflates the cheeks, and extends the nostrils; whence the most beautiful face in the world at length becomes the mask of folly.

It is true, that a well-timed smile may heighten the beauty of a pretty woman; but the elevation of the voice beyond a musical tone, can be no auxilliary in the cause.

It seldom happens that men of the most elevated genius are much addicted to risibility. It should seem that their innate modesty would not allow them to give way to extravagant follies of joy; and I have known many men of wit prefer the tears of Heraclitus to the laughter of Democritus. I nevertheless seriously believe there is no small portion of vanity in this reserve: to laugh at another's conceit is giving it the utmost sanction of applause, when, perhaps, a *professed genius* has not been able to extort this plaudit from any of the company, with all his efforts of humour and pleasantry. Besides, he has constantly the poet's opinion at hand to keep him in awe:

Fools admire, but men of sense approve.

We may, I think, impartially venture to conclude, that extravagant peals of laughter, upon all occasions, are the sure signs of folly, and want of discrimination; and, on the other hand, that the man whose risible muscles are immutable, and whose countenance is incapable of wearing a change, at a lively sally well-timed, or a real good joke, must either be insensible of humour, or so entirely wrapped up

with his own self-importance, as to be a very disagreeable companion.

If we may credit historians, there have been many instances of people literally bursting with laughter. Valerius Maximus tells us of one Philemon, who was highly pleased at seeing an ass eat a basket of figs, and ordered him a glass of wine to prevent his having the cholic, which conceit so tickled his fancy, that he died with laughing. Cælius Rhodignius also mentions a similar fool named Zeuxis, a celebrated painter of old, who having painted an old woman in a whimsical posture, found his picture so pleasant, that nothing but death could terminate the operation of his risible muscles.

If these were foolish, they must at least be allowed pleasant deaths; and though Philemon and Zeuxis were very ridiculous characters, they were still preferable to those of Timon of Athens, or Diogenes the Cynic. In a word, both extremes are equally contemptible.

THE WIDOW; IN THE MANNER OF STERNE.

HAIL! thou fostering nurse of the wretched; the divine accents of whose tongue pour balm into the bleeding wounds of misery!—Thou, whom poets have defined to be clad in bright ethereal robes, and with eyes whose lustre resembles the dew drop when brightened by the ray of Phœbus! Thou, who leadest Charity to the spot where Poverty, pinched by hunger, “bides the pelting of the pitiless storm” of adversity!—To thee, O Pity! I call; and may thy soft vibrations never be wanting to infuse in my breast the emotions of Philanthropy!

“Pity the misfortunes of a poor distressed widow!” exclaimed a feeble voice to the busy crowds as they passed her: I turned round, and fixed my eyes on the suppliant, who was cloathed in rags, and lay stretched on the cold pavement. Her languid head was supported on the palm of her right hand, while her left held out the remains of a hat, to receive the bounty of some generous stranger; a few grey hairs, scattered around her temples, bespoke her fast advancing towards the last stage of life; and a tear that trickled down her furrowed cheek told me, in silent though expressive language, that the journey had been a wearisome one: yet, though on her countenance was visibly pourtrayed the traces of heavy care, never did the pallid of the graceful Corregio give to sorrow a more resigned aspect than I traced in the features of this poor outcast of society: she was, to use the language of the Poet of Nature, “Patience smiling at grief.” Of the many who passed her, few, very few, seemed to feel the impulse of pity, and deign to bestow the

fostering boon of charity; and wilt thou too, Yorrick (said a something in my bosom as I surveyed the miserable object before me)—wilt thou, who has so oft felt for the wants of thy fellow-creatures more than thy own, refuse now thy scanty pittance? No! a nobler sentiment than avarice now animates my feelings. I took out my purse, and threw the little it contained into the lap of the poor widow: her eyes, as she raised them to me, seemed to beam with gratitude; but the inward tumults of her heart denied her utterance. “Never,” said I, resuming my walk, “may I think the purchase dear; if, by bestowing a few pence on the unfortunate, it enables me to place a smile in their dejected features!”

FOR THE DESSERT.

THE QUAKER GIRL.

A neat Quaker girl, in her Sabbath day gown, I ever preferred to the belles of the town; Averse to the giddy meanders of dress, Not fond to exceed in each maddish excess.

No stiff formal plate cramps the curl of her hair, No art can disguise, or the black or the fair; No custom can force the thin gauze from her breast,

Or shorten her stays half the length of her waist.

Content with the beauties from nature receiv'd, Who sees her and likes her is never deceiv'd; Her neatness and modesty please still the more, And heighten each charm we discovered before; For every perfection which modesty hides, But serves as a guide to a thousand besides.

K.

THE WONDERFUL LIQUOR.

THE Chinese are weak enough to imagine, that there are certain persons among them who are possessed of the secret of preparing a liquor, which will make the person who drinks it live for ever; and whenever any of their friends die, who have drank of this liquor, they think there was something wanting in the composition, which every succeeding projector hopes he has discovered. One of their emperors was confident he had purchased the immortal draught. He had a cup of this liquor of life before him, and was declaiming on the virtues and excellency of it, but while he turned his back, his favourite had the assurance to drink off part of it; whereupon the emperor, in a rage, threatened him with immediate death: to which the sanguine minister calmly replied, Do you suppose you can deprive me of life, now I have drank of the immortal cup? If you can, what have you lost? If you cannot, I am become equally immortal with you. And, by this short way of reasoning this wise favourite brought the whimsical emperor to his senses, when all other arguments seemed to be thrown away upon him.

The Dessert.

A RELATION OF SOME INTERESTING PARTICULARS CONCERNING EGYPT.

UNDER the name of Egypt, there is only comprehended a narrow piece of land, divided in two by the Nile, enclosed with high mountains on the East and West sides, beginning at the Cataracts, and ending near Cairo; together with what is commonly called the Delta, which is formed by the two branches of the Nile, that separate about nine English miles below Cairo, one emptying itself into the sea, near Rosetta, the other at Damietta. "The length of Egypt is about 600 miles from North to South; the breadth of the Delta is 120; but in the middle of the other part only 21 miles; and it decreases continually to the Cataracts, where the two ridges of mountains join.

Egypt being so small a piece of land, it is not easily conceived how it can maintain that vast number of inhabitants, which all writers attribute to it. To give the colour of truth to their assertions, they have said that there were several crops in one year, and that the sheep went with young annually more than once. But there is no truth in these assertions.

The soil of Egypt, is not equally fertile every where; that which lies next to the Nile, and on which the water, at the overflowing season, stands forty days, gives ten fold in the best crops, and this produce decreases in proportion to the shorter time which the water continues to cover the fields; there are some on which the water only remains five days, and they are reckoned to produce much, if they give a fourfold return.

The learned have been long puzzled by the swelling of the waters of the Nile, and its inundations, and most of them have found something miraculous in one of the most natural phenomena in the world. The rains which fall in Abyssinia and Ethiopia cause the increase and overflowings of the river; but the northerly winds is to be considered as the principal cause, 1st. Because it carries the clouds to Abyssinia. 2. Because, by blowing up the two mouths of the Nile, it forces back the waters, and by that means prevents too great a

bulk from emptying into the sea. This circumstance may be observed every year; for, when the wind is northerly, and at once veers round to the south, the Nile falls in one day, as much as it can rise in four.

It is an error to say, that it does not rain in Egypt. It rains frequently, and a great deal in Lower Egypt, but rarely in Middle Egypt, and never in Upper Egypt, meaning thereby that narrow vale which extends between the two ridges of mountains. The constant winds which blow from the Nile, and the vallies about it, drive the clouds to the right and left; consequently, the rain on the mountains is very considerable throughout the winter, and the torrents which come down from them carry a great proportion of water to the Nile.

It has been related, that, previous to the swellings of the Nile, a fermentation happens in the water, which may be discerned by its green colour and bad taste; but nothing can be more false than this pretended fermentation. The water becomes naturally putrid by standing still for two months and a half together before the summer solstice; because the rocks and sands at its mouth, together with the north easterly wind, when that begins to blow, prevents its decrease. It is likewise asserted, that the Nile when it increases, carries a slime with it which manures the soil, but this is likewise a mistake. When the Nile has risen eighteen feet, it touches a reddish soil, of which a stratum of six feet high makes its banks in Upper Egypt; and the water moving very thick downwards at that time, washes the earth from the banks, and carries it down with it. For this reason, the water gets a reddish brown colour, and becomes quite troubled or opaque. They restore its transparency, by covering the inside of the vessels in which it is put with a paste of bitter almonds; by this means, a reddish brown earth is precipitated, but not slime.

Upon the whole, if it were true, that the Nile carried any slime along with it, it would be found at the beginning of its increase, and not towards the end; but it is certain, that when the river has not risen above seventeen feet, the water remains very clear.

The air of Egypt has been accounted healthy by some; but, after a short stay in the country, the contrary may be easily found. Nothing is more common than diseases of the eyes, and they are so difficult to cure, that almost all

who are afflicted with them lose their sight; so that Egypt may with good reason be called "The land of the blind." It is also to be observed, that bloody ulcers form on the thighs and knees, and carry off the patients in three or four days. In winter the small pox kills a great number of people, and, about the time of the Nile's increase, most of the inhabitants are ill of a continued dysentery, occasioned by the use of the waters of that river, which at that period are mixed with various saline particles.

In Egypt they know only two seasons, winter and summer. The winter begins in December, and ends in March. At that time, the heat, which is caused by the south winds reigning from April to the summer solstice, becomes insupportable. Egypt being a very dry country, which has no other fresh water than that of the Nile, the inhabitants of those towns and villages which are not situated on its banks, make great canals, which they fill with water, when the river overflows. This they drink till March, though in the latter month it begins to be putrid; and, till the next inundation, they make use of water they find in the fields, at the depth of two or three feet; and, though it be very stinking, yet they employ it for their cattle.

As there are so many stagnant waters in Egypt, it is not to be wondered at, that the air is very unwholesome, and that every five years the plague makes ravages there; and, besides this periodical one, it is sometimes in the interval imported from other countries.

Provisions, and especially bread, have no taste here, nor can it be otherwise; for, the soil consisting of earth and salt, and being watered only once every year, it cannot produce corn or plants of any good taste.

ANECDOTES.

Mr. ——, who during the late war was surgeon of the Namur, asking one of his patients how he did, the seaman answered, Thank God, I am quite recovered. What, you thank God, do you, you d——d scoundrel, said the surgeon; I'll learn you to thank God! and began beating him. You d——d rascal, you ought to thank me, not God; for it was I that cured you!

MANDEVILLE, in his Fable of the Bees, seems to have formed a whimsical notion of what were, in his time, the requisites to make a judge, for he says any tolerable lawyer, not notorious for dishonesty, is always fit to be judge as soon as he is old, and sufficiently serious to go through his business with a grave face.



FOR THE DESSERT.

SONGS.

(Tune the "Rose Tree.")

A rose indeed soon withers,
And so will beauty's pride,
And time, that quick destroyer
The fairest form will hide!

Each gay and fleeting hour
A canker woes contain,
And proves like fading flow'r's
Man's boasted joys are vain!

Virtue alone will shield us
From storms, and chilling blasts,
And is the only flow'r,
Whose beauty always lasts.

In Mira's breast, 'twill flourish
Its native soil is there;
And where it grows does banish
All sorrow, and despair.

R.

THE WISH.

Far from the reach of fortune's pow'r,
Oh, let me spend each fleeting hour
From galling slavery free!
The wretch, who works the mine is blest,
Compared with him whose tortured breast
Ambition's slave must be!

ADVICE.

(Tune "Sterne's Maria.")

The rose that blooms at morning dawn,
By ev'ning's quite decayed!
So will it be with Julia's charms,
Improve them ere they fade.

The little aunt provides with care
'Gainst winter's angry blasts:
Improve the hint, lay up a store,
Of that which always lasts.

Then let the storms of life come on,
Your minds will stem the tide;
Virtue the pilot of your youth,
Through age will be your guide.

THE CONTRAST.

OR CÆSAR & WASHINGTON.

POOR is his triumph and disgrac'd his name,
Who draws his sword for gold or barb'rous fame;
For him though wealth be blown on every wind,
Tho' fame announce him fiercest of mankind,
Tho' twice ten nations crouch beneath his blade,
Virtue disowns him and his glories fade;
For him no pray'r's are pour'd, no paans sung,
No blessings chanted from a nation's tongue;
Blood marks the path to his untimely bier;
The curse of widows, and the orphan's tear,
Cry to high heav'ns for vengeance on his head:
Alive detested and accurst when dead.
Indignant of his deeds, the muse that sings
Undaunted truth and scorns to flatter kings,
Shall show the monster in his hideous form,
And point a CÆSAR as the mark of scorn.
Not so the patriot chief who dares withstand,
Each proud oppressor of his native land;
Who makes her wealth his noblest, only end.
Rules but to serve her, fights but to defend;
Her voice in council, and in fight her sword,
Lov'd as her father, as her God ador'd;
Who, firmly virtuous, generously brave,
Unmov'd by passion, conquers but to save.
On worth like his, the muse delights to wait,
Reveres alike in triumph or defeat;
Crowns with true glory and with deathless fame,
Enrols with heroes WASHINGTON's lov'd name.

BRIEF CHARACTER OF POPE, AS A TRANSLATOR OF HOMER.

FROM the time which it first appeared, "that poetical wonder," as it has not improperly been called, the translation of the Iliad by Pope, has been in possession of the public regard; and it seems to be losing no portion of its popularity as it proceeds further on its passage to future ages. Though its bright and pre-eminent merits have united a vast majority of suffrages in its favour, a few dissenting voices have been heard to jar in the crowd, and to detract from the unanimity of the applause. When the first tumult of admiration, excited by its proud display of poetic power, had in some measure subsided, it was represented by the indignant scholar as being unfaithful in its transcript, and as conveying to the English reader an imperfect or a false idea of the venerable father of Grecian poetry. With that infuseable firmness of rigorous criticism, which is proof against the most controlling fascination of poetry, our great translator has been arraigned, and like a criminal dragged to justice for every coarseness which he has artfully veiled; every simplicity, which he has converted into elegance; every unauthorized epithet or allusions

which his glowing and picturesque fancy has supplied; every grace and beauty, in short, which, while they adorn the English, cannot distinctly be traced in their flow from the Grecian Iliad. The attack has been repeated at different periods, but always without effect;

"Aras Dei ad volcania ventura
Mortalis mucro glacies teu futi is letu
Diffituit;"

and though an attempt has been made in the present day to support this attack by a more perfect and *Hmeric* exhibition, in our language, of the mighty ancient, the result has still been unfavourable to the expectations of the adventurer; and has only involved the poetic competitor of Pope in the same condemnation of neglect with his critic. Firm in their attachment to their old favorite, and fearing on the luxuries of his page, the public have refused to quarrel with what pleases them; or to accept of a treat, more correctly, it must be confessed, after the Grecian model, but not so accommodated to their palates.

Neither can their taste in this instance be questioned without hesitation or risk. If the Iliad of Pope be not defensible as an exact copy of that of Homer, the English poem must be acknowledged on the whole to be an adequate representative of the Grecian. The resemblance, indeed, of his original is presented to us by our translator, not as reflected in a mirror, with every mole, and wrinkle, and grey hair, made obvious to the eye; but as existing in a masterly portrait, which, painted on the grand principle of ideal conception, and rejecting from it's draught the minuter lines and peculiarities of the face, is illustriously authentic with the great stamp of countenance and character. In this translation, we behold one poet maintaining an intercourse of affluence with another; gaining and yielding profit by a barter of rare commodities; and so conducting the traffic as to leave the balance, on the final adjustment of the account, in a state of doubtful equality.

ANECDOTES.

A reprobate buck parson, going to read prayers at a remote village in the West of England, found great difficulty in putting on the surplice, which was an old fashioned one: "Damn this old surplice," said he to the clerk, "I think the devil is in it!" The astonished clerk, waited till the parson had got it on, and then most irreverently answered—"I think as how a iz, zir!"

In the year 1715, when Doctor Halley's calculation of the year Solar Eclipse, was a general conversation, a Turkish envoy who happened to be in London, said he was certain the prediction was fallacious, for God never revealed such things to unbelievers. The eclipse appeared at the moment it had been calculated, and Lord Forster asked the Turk, what he thought then? "That they must have their intelligence from the devil, for God Almighty, would hold no correspondence with such a wretched set of unbelievers as the English astronomers," was the Turk's reply.